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ESSENTIAL CHRISTIANITY.¹

By PROFESSOR WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, PH.D.,
Union Theological Seminary, New York.

THE book whose title we have put at the head of this article has more than an individual significance. There are times in the history of thought, as in business, when men balance their accounts and take stock of their accumulated capital. From the details of research which make up the routine of the scholar's life, they turn to the underlying questions of meaning and value, and ask themselves what is the spiritual significance of the results obtained. The book which is able to answer this question, or even clearly to raise it, becomes a classic. Men see in it the discovery of their own deepest thoughts, the interpretation of their labors, the revelation of things, suspected it may be, but only dimly apprehended. Gathering to a head the different streams of influence of the past, it becomes a point of departure for the new thought of the future. Such a book was Schleiermacher's *Discourses on Religion*, and such—unless all appearances are deceptive—will prove Harnack's lectures on *The Essence of Christianity*.²

The contrast between the two books is as interesting as it is instructive. When Schleiermacher wrote, the eighteenth century was dying. It was a time of intellectual and spiritual unrest. The forms in which an earlier generation had expressed its religious life proved no longer able to contain the vigorous tide which was rising to meet the new century. To the Deist religion

¹ *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Sechzehn Vorlesungen vor Studierenden aller Facultäten im Wintersemester 1899-1900 an der Universität Berlin gehalten von ADOLF HARNACK. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1900. Pp. 190. M. 3.50.

What is Christianity? Sixteen Lectures delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter Term 1899-1900 by ADOLF HARNACK. Translated into English by Thomas Bailey Saunders. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901. Pp. 301. \$3.

² The comparison has already been made by Bousset in the *Theologische Rundschau* for March, 1901, pp. 89 ff.

had been a matter of law and order—a divinely appointed discipline, designed to regulate and restrain the passions of the unruly, and to point out the safe pathway of duty, along which one might pass to the distant heaven, where the God, whose existence logic had proved, remained waiting to bestow his reward of immortality. To the contemporary of Goethe and of Schlegel all this seemed cold, barren, unprofitable. Fires burned within him for which this gospel provided no fuel. Romanticism had opened up to him a side of life hitherto unsuspected. He felt the magic of art with its revelation of the beautiful. He bathed his spirit in the writings of the poets. In the passion which he had been taught to regard as sinful he felt a heavenly inspiration, and sang hymns in praise of the divinity of love. In this rich, full life, religion—at least what men called such—had no place. It was not merely rejected; it was forgotten. It no longer came within the horizon of interest. If it stirred any feeling at all in the breasts of educated men, it was that of contempt.

In such an age and before such an audience Schleiermacher stands forth as the prophet of the abiding worth of religion. What you call religion, he cries, is not really such. The dogmas and rites with which you identify it are only garments in which for the time it has chanced to clothe itself, but which may be thrown aside without affecting its nature. Religion is neither doctrine nor ceremony. Religion is experience. It has its home below thought, even below conscience, in the emotional nature of man. Religion is the sense of the infinite in the finite. It is the discovery, in the midst of the commonplaces of life, of something which has abiding worth, and the free yielding of self to its influence. When you stand transfixed before some glorious picture, it is religion which thrills within you; when you yield yourself to the joy of activity and glory in your self-expression, it is still religion which explains your joy. The God I call you to worship is not far away, dwelling in some distant heaven. He is all about you, nearer to you than your thought. In him you live and move and have your being; you cannot escape him if you would; you should not if you could. Why rob yourself of your birthright as a man?

The effect of this appeal was extraordinary. The note had been struck to which the temper of the age was attuned. Men heard one speaking as one of themselves, in tones which they could understand, of experiences with which they were familiar, but which they had hitherto misinterpreted. They were quick to respond to the new message. Men of all parties and of no party—orthodox churchmen, rationalistic theologians, and men who stood aloof from both—perceived that religion was something more fundamental and more many-sided than they had realized, and were quickened to a new interest in its study. A new chapter had opened in the religious history of Germany. Modern theology was born.

A hundred years have passed away, and again a man arises in Germany to hold discourse concerning religion. The conditions which he confronts are very different from those which Schleiermacher faced. Romanticism has had its day, and Schlegel, its high-priest, is all but forgotten. Darwin and Haeckel are the names to conjure with today. Trained in the methods of exact science, men have learned to distrust the feeling, and look with suspicion upon all that is purely individual. They no longer hope with Hegel to attain knowledge of absolute truth. It is enough if they can describe and classify the phenomena they find about them without inquiring too curiously into the nature of the ultimate reality. In default of a better test, appeal is made to practical efficiency, and the man who claims finality for his views, whether in religion or philosophy, is met with polite incredulity. Such is the background against which we must set Harnack's lectures on the essence of Christianity. Originally delivered to an audience of some six hundred students drawn from the different departments of the University of Berlin, they have already found their way to a wider public. The phenomenal reception accorded the book in its printed form proves that it contains a message for which many thoughtful men were waiting. Harnack, like his great predecessor, has gained the ear of educated Germany, and it is a matter of no small interest to English-speaking Christians to learn what he has to say.

The question to which he invites the attention of his hearers is a narrower one than that raised by Schleiermacher. It is not religion in general which is the subject of his inquiry, but the Christian religion. The restricted theme accords with the temper of the age, which distrusts broad generalization, and loves the concrete, the exact, the practical. To a generation which has given its keenest attention to the problems which gather about the rise and history of Christianity, and has followed with unwearied interest the critical investigations devoted to their solution, he would make report of the spiritual significance of the results attained. The enemy with which he has to contend is not so much ignorance as overmuch knowledge—a familiarity with the details of scholarly research which has rubbed away the bloom of reverence, destroyed the sense of proportion, and, in its effort to understand this or that phase of its subject, lost sight of the originality and greatness of Christianity as a whole. What is wanted under these circumstances is not so much an advocate who can break down a wall of prejudice in order to gain a hearing for his plea, as a judge, trained in the laws of evidence, who can find his way to the heart of an intricate problem, clear it of all that is irrelevant and confusing, and interpret to men anxious to know the truth the real meaning of the complex phenomena by which they are confronted. It is as such a judge that Harnack writes. What he offers is not an apology, but a history. The personal note, so prominent in Schleiermacher's discourses, is here held in reserve. It is not the prophet who speaks, testifying to what he has himself seen and heard of the things of God, but the man of science, who distrusts what is merely individual, and seeks to build his conclusions upon the broad foundation of objective fact.

The method, then, is historical. But history must not be interpreted too narrowly. It is not the mere record of dates and events. It includes all human experiences—the inner as well as the outer. It takes in the hopes and the fears, the faiths and the insights, the heroisms and the loyalties, which give meaning and value to life. Stick as closely as he will to the methods of exact science, the historian must never overlook "the experience

which is the outgrowth of history which has been lived.”³ He must not blunt his sympathies or dull his sense for what is fine and great. Without such insight he may become an archæologist; he cannot be a historian.⁴

Approaching Christianity in this spirit, we are struck first of all by its distinctive character. Making all allowances for its points of contact with contemporary thought, the changes through which it has passed, the injuries and misrepresentations which it has suffered from friends as well as from foes, it is yet the fact that in the religion of Jesus we have to do with a spiritual force so lofty, so simple, so consistent,⁵ that no true man who looks at it with open eye can fail to appreciate its originality and its greatness. Harnack is not without appreciation of the light which has been shed on the origins of Christianity by the study of contemporary history. He himself has contributed in no small degree to this better understanding, and no one has been quicker to perceive or more apt to distinguish the elements which have entered into the growing edifice of Christian thought from Jewish or Greek sources. But when all is said, these are but the environment, the outworks. Christianity itself is something distinct from its setting, and may be understood without it.

“The oftener I read and re-read the gospels”—so our author sums up his experience—“the more do the contemporary discords in the midst of which the gospel stood, and out of which it arose, fall into the background. I entertain no doubt that even from the beginning the founder had fixed his eye upon man as man without respect to the outward circumstances in which he might find himself—man who at bottom remains ever the same, be his line of progress upward or downward, be he in riches or in poverty, strong in intellect or feeble in spirit.”⁶

It is this universal human appeal which gives Christianity its abiding power and freshness.

In studying Christianity, then, we have to do with a spiritual force which, while appealing to man as man and freely appropriating to itself all that is good and true which it finds already

³ P. 4. The references are to the original. Here, as often in what follows, I have ventured to make my own translation.

⁴ Cf. Preface: “Als ‘Archäologie’ ist alle Geschichte stumm.”

⁵ P. 5.

⁶ P. 10.

in existence, is yet itself so original as to be easily distinguishable from all its antecedents, and so distinctive as to admit of scientific description and definition. Where shall we find this Christianity? And, having found it, what do we see?

The first question admits of a very simple answer. To learn what true Christianity is we must study Jesus Christ and his gospel.⁷ And by Christ, Harnack means the historical Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who walked among men as brother, teacher, and friend, who healed the sick, preached to the poor, gathered disciples, proclaimed himself the Messiah, and at last laid down his life on Calvary because he would not be false to his gospel or exchange his spiritual standard for the lower ideal demanded by his countrymen. In common with all who have felt the influence of Ritschl, Harnack is clear that no attempt to understand Christianity as a historical religion can be successful which does not take its departure from the historical Christ.

But the "historical Christ" is itself an ambiguous term. How much shall we include in our survey? The picture of Jesus as painted in the gospels? The outline of his gospel as therein contained? A picture of Christianity which should contain no more than this would fall lamentably short of the truth. "The greater a personality, the more it lays hold upon the inner life of others, the less can the whole of its nature be discovered from its own deeds and words."⁸ To know Jesus one must take into account the influence exerted upon all those who have been touched by his spirit. The gospels must be supplemented by the epistles—the story of the brief ministry in Galilee and in Jerusalem by the disciples' faith in the risen Christ.

Nor is this all. Unless we are ready to admit that Christianity is something which belongs to a single age or period of the world; unless we shut our eyes to the spiritual forces of which it has been the parent in every generation, we must take into account all the later fruits of the spirit of Christ. "It is not a question of a doctrine which has been handed down by an unchanging tradition, or altered arbitrarily, but of a life which, ever kindled anew, now burns with its own flame."⁹ Christ

⁷ P. 6.

⁸ P. 6.

⁹ P. 7.

anticipated such later developments in his religion. He expected that its future would be greater than its past. It was his desire to kindle independent religious life. "Indeed, we may say that herein lies his characteristic greatness, that he led men to God, that thereafter they might live their own life with him."¹⁰ If this be true, how is it possible to describe the nature of Christianity apart from its history?

Thus we are brought face to face with a problem. We have to do with a religion which professes to contain truth for man as man, and which yet, as history shows, has been continually changing. How shall we distinguish the eternal truth from its changing forms? Harnack is not blind to the difficulty of the task, yet his confidence in the adaptation of Christianity to the needs of humanity is such that he does not despair. Even the changes through which Christianity has passed assist us in our task, for they discover to us what is permanent and what is transient, and help us to correct any mistakes which we may have made in our reading of the original gospel. If we wish a formula to guide us in our search for essential Christianity, Harnack gives us the following: Take that which is common in all the forms of historical Christianity, and test it by the gospel; and conversely, take the principles of the gospel, and test them by history.¹¹ He who applies this double test cannot go far astray.

We have lingered so long over these introductory questions because of their importance. In studying so complex and many-sided a subject as Christianity all turns on the right method. On the one hand, we find those who tell us that everything which has come down to us through Christian tradition is sacred; that the earlier forms must be interpreted by the later, and that the only safe way to determine what is essential Christianity is to accept without question the standard which is held by the church of which the student is part. On the other hand, we find those who regard all change as corruption—who identify

¹⁰ P. 7.

¹¹ P. 10. "Das Gemeinsame in allen diesen Erscheinungen, kontrolliert an dem Evangelium, und wiederum die Grundzüge des Evangeliums, kontrolliert an der Geschichte."

true Christianity with its most primitive form, and whose cry, "Back to Christ!" means the rejection as un-Christian of all which cannot be found written in so many words within our four evangelists. Harnack follows neither of these methods. He recognizes the truth for which each stands, and so opens the way for a treatment of his theme which shall combine the merits of both.

To set forth in detail the conception of Christianity developed in these lectures would carry us beyond our limits. The book is a masterpiece of condensation, and no abstract can convey any idea of the wealth of material which it contains. We can give but the merest bird's-eye view of the territory which is traversed.

Christianity, according to Harnack, may be summed up in two words: "Jesus Christ and his gospel."¹² It is a message vitalized by a person.

If we ask what is the message of Jesus, no single answer is possible. There are three different circles of thought, or, if you will, three different points of view from which we may approach the gospel to bring it to expression. These are (1) the kingdom of God and its coming; (2) the fatherhood of God, and the worth of the individual human soul; and (3) the better righteousness and the law of love. Each of these contributes something essential to the understanding of Christianity.

To his contemporaries Jesus was known as a preacher of the kingdom of God. The term is not without its perplexities. It comes to us out of the world of Judaism, bringing with it eschatological and apocalyptic associations foreign to our thought. There are not lacking scholars who see in Jesus' teaching only the echo of contemporary messianic ideas, and regard our more spiritual interpretation as historically unjustified. With such views Harnack has no sympathy. He does not deny the connection with Judaism. Jesus was a man of his time, speaking to men of his time, and using forms wrought out by the thought of his time. If we begin with the form, it is not hard to explain away the originality of his teaching, and to see

¹² P. 6.

in him simply the last and greatest of the prophets. But such a standard of judgment Harnack holds to be wholly misleading. We judge great men, not by what they share with their contemporaries, but by what is new in their teaching.¹³ Apply this principle to the gospel of Jesus, as we read it, for example, in the parables of the kingdom, and the difficulty is resolved. Here we learn what Jesus really means by the kingdom—a divine and superhuman life, consisting in contact with the living God, our Father, possible even now in the midst of this earthly life, open to all who approach it in humility, trustfulness, and penitence, and, as such, the supreme end and object of life—the one thing worth living for, the one thing worth dying for. Here is a conception of religion so new, so simple, so satisfying, as to differentiate Christianity as a distinct type from all preceding forms of the religious life.

This general conception is further unfolded and enriched when we consider the second line of thought referred to—the doctrine (let us say rather, the experience) of God as Father, and the discovery, little less than revolutionary, of the supreme worth of the human soul. The two things go together. Jesus, through his own experience of sonship, has become the discoverer of brotherhood in the comprehensive sense in which it has become an article of Christian faith. Do you ask what is the essence of Christianity? Harnack, using the Lord's Prayer as key, answers: "It is divine sonship, spread out over the whole of life, an inner harmony with God's will and with God's kingdom, and a joyful certainty in the possession of eternal goods and in confidence of protection from evil."¹⁴

This view of God and man works itself out to a practical theory of life in the ethics of Jesus—the ethics which lays all stress upon motive, which finds the supreme motive in love, and which, through its emphasis upon humility as the dominating note of all right living, harmonizes as has never been done before the highest ethics and the purest religion.

Such being in substance the gospel of Jesus, how does it work? How does it relate itself to the great practical questions

¹³ Cf. pp. 35 f.

¹⁴ P. 42.

which face us on every side: the question of the world or of asceticism; of poverty, or the social question; of law, or the question of human governments and ordinances; of work, or the question of civilization? Nowhere does the author show a finer discrimination than in his handling of these difficult themes.

Is Christianity an ascetic religion? Yes, say some with sorrow, fearing that this proves its day is past. Yes, say some with relief, finding in the fact an excuse to be rid of its claim. No, answers Harnack, not if you judge it by Jesus' method of life, by the impression which he produced upon his disciples, and by the principles of his gospel. But Christianity recognizes the truth for which asceticism stands, and in its own way makes place for it. There are three great evils to be resisted, yes, to be destroyed as inconsistent with the existence of the gospel. They are Mammon, that is, money considered as a power which masters life; care, in the sense of anxiety in all its forms; and selfishness. Against these Jesus sets the duty of self-sacrifice as the law of life. If this be asceticism, then the gospel is ascetic.

What of the question of poverty? Was Jesus a social reformer, as Tolstoi says? No. He recognized poverty as an evil to be fought. He had a heart tender for social distress, but he set up no social program, and they misread him who think to find one in his teachings. He is concerned with principles, not with their application in detail. Yet there can be no doubt that he recognized that there are times and men for whom the duty of renunciation of riches is to be taken in all literalness. That so few Protestants have felt it their duty to follow his counsel to the young ruler is something which may well give us pause. The time will surely come when the Protestant churches will require of their official ministers a standard of sacrifice far higher than now obtains—not because wealth and comfort are in themselves evil, but because it is practically impossible to accomplish the work of the gospel effectively under the conditions in which many of the ministry of our day live.¹⁵

What of law? Is the gospel anti-legal in all its forms? Or

¹⁵ Cf. p. 62.

is it, as some proclaim, the great conservative force, sanctifying as divine existing governments and institutions? Certainly not the last. Toleration is not approval. Because Jesus did not oppose the lawful government of his time, this does not mean that he approved it. The truth is, rather, that this whole circle of questions lay outside the center of his thought. He had so keen a sense of the greatness and of the certainty of the divine justice as to feel the comparative unimportance of earthly injustice, so far as its ability to work permanent injury to the child of God is concerned. Let there be but a loving spirit, and he was confident that in time it would win its way over every form of opposition. To all attempts, such as that of the National Socialists and others, to better the condition of the working classes by law, the gospel is indifferent; by which Harnack means that it does not commit itself to them as a finality. It is not concerned "with things, but with the souls of men."¹⁶ Or, to put it in another form, its forces have to do "with the deepest foundations of human nature and with these alone."¹⁷ Yet, on this very account, it works as a continual ferment in social life. It is the most social of religions, because it is so intensely individual.¹⁸

Much the same is true of its relation to the intellectual life of man. Jesus has been criticised for his one-sidedness, his narrowness. We are told that he had no sympathy with culture, with art, with science, with all that goes to make up what we call the professional life. Men warn us that, before they can admit the claim of the gospel to finality, this gap must be filled. Harnack is not deceived by this specious pleading. Where is the finality in art? in philosophy? in science? We see a ceaseless quest, a task never accomplished. Tie a religion to the culture of any age, and you destroy it for the next. We see this in Roman Catholicism, trying in vain to force upon our twentieth century the social conditions of the Middle Ages.

¹⁶ P. 74.¹⁷ P. 79.

¹⁸ Cf. p. 64, where he declares that there can be no doubt that had Jesus lived today he would have been found in the company of those who are striving to relieve social distress and to provide for the poor more tolerable conditions of existence.

Here the limitations of Christianity are the conditions of its greatness. The Jewish setting of the gospel is so clearly to be distinguished from its eternal truths that even he who runs may read. The simplicity of Jesus' gospel is its abiding power.

Back of these special questions lies the great question of Christology. We have said that Christianity is a message vitalized by a person. What is the relation of Jesus' person to his message? In what sense does he require faith in himself? Not, answers Harnack, in any other sense than that of obedience, or in such form as to exclude the true humanity and dependence which are written on every page of the gospel story.¹⁹ Yet that Jesus was conscious of knowing God, as none before him, and of its being his function to mediate this knowledge to others, is equally certain. In the title "Son of God" he expresses his consciousness of a unique relationship to the Father. How he gained this knowledge, what it involved, we know not. That is Jesus' secret. But the fact is clear, and the claim history confirms.²⁰ It is as true today as in the days of Paul and of John that Jesus mediates the knowledge of God as none other. The same truth comes to expression in that other term, harder for us moderns to understand, the Messiah—a term essentially Jewish, yet because of its historical significance capable of expressing a truth wider than any which Judaism knew. Messiahship is the form under which the Jew expressed his sense of an absolute value. Jesus, accepting the title, entered into the claim, and at the same time destroyed its significance for all who come after. For us who are not Jews the absolute value of Jesus can be better expressed by other terms, but the fact abides. To sum up: the person of Jesus is not an additional element added to the gospel we have described, but the form in which the gospel necessarily expresses itself in view of the conditions of its origin. The content of the gospel is the Father, not the Son, yet Jesus knows himself as the way to the Father, and with the knowledge binds together gospel and person in a unity which time has neither dissolved nor weakened.²¹

This gives us the principles for answering the vexed question

¹⁹ Cf. p. 80.

²⁰ Cf. pp. 81 f.

²¹ Cf. pp. 91 f.

as to the significance of doctrine in Christianity. It follows from what has been said that the true confession is obedience. Christianity is not committed to any special scientific or philosophical view of the world. History proves that it can be at home in all. Where religion is experienced as love to God and man, as the consciousness of present forgiveness and peace, as devotion to the kingdom of service, in imitation and obedience of Christ, there we have the gospel in substance, whether its exponent be Greek philosopher, Roman statesman, or modern German professor. For the great antitheses to which the gospel appeals, and on which it rests, abide through all change and outlive every explanation—the contrast of flesh and of spirit, of good and of evil, of God and of the world. In its practical solution of these world-old problems the gospel shows itself immortal.

This, in substance, is the thesis to which the latter part of the book is devoted. Through the different forms of historical Christianity Harnack follows the gospel, to see how it has maintained itself under the changed conditions. He studies it in the apostolic age, where it shows itself in the recognition of Jesus as Lord, both crucified and risen Savior. He finds the characteristic notes of apostolic Christianity to be the common experience of a present God, and a life of holy living. He gives special attention to the apostle Paul, in whom he sees neither the founder of Christianity, with some, nor its destroyer, with others, but the disciple (so Paul calls himself, and Harnack thinks he ought to know) who best understood Jesus, who was truest to his gospel, and who, just because he best understood Jesus, realized most clearly the essential newness of his gospel, and the greatness of the gulf between Christianity and all forms of religion which preceded it. He follows the gospel out into the larger world of Greece and Rome, and sees how the new religion finds new forms at once to express and to limit it. He traces the growth of Catholicism, recognizing its relative right, and the great work which it has wrought, but seeing in it a sad limitation of the freedom and spontaneity of the gospel. He notes as one of the marvels of Jesus' religion that, instead of

destroying, it requires and intensifies individual independence. The sin of sins of Catholicism, in all its forms, is that it has abandoned Jesus' faith in a present God, able to speak directly to every child of his. It lives on the memory of others' experiences in the past, instead of seeking new and fresh experiences in the present, and so the men who have such experiences (as, thank God, there are many in all the churches who do) find themselves hampered and confined, and oftentimes utterly repudiated. In Catholicism, Greek and Roman, the older religious forces live on—the paganism of the pre-Christian Greek religion, the externalism of the state religion of Rome; and the gospel is at most a leaven, if not, alas! only a memory. In Roman Catholicism, indeed, there is one mighty constructive force which is lacking in the Greek church, and that is the influence of Augustine, who, in a way unparalleled since Paul, conceived Christianity as a personal experience of God's redeeming love. Against his influence the traditional and conservative influences of the hierarchy carry on their ceaseless battle, now with greater, now with less success. Protestantism is to be understood as a reassertion, in their purity and simplicity, of the original elements in the gospel. It is before all a simplification of religion, the casting off of the great mass of foreign material which has gathered about the gospel through the centuries, and the reaffirmation of religion as personal experience of the divine love and forgiveness, and the union of all believers in the universal priesthood of service.

With the Reformation we reach the last great stage in the evolution of Christianity. Mighty as are the changes wrought by modern science, they have brought no new element into the problem. The great difficulties which keep men from Christ today are still the old ones, and here there is no argument which can take the place of personal conviction. Ask science whence come the great curves which it studies, and whither they go—the curve of the world in which we live, the curve of our own individual life. You will get no clearer answer than that of the Greeks, two thousand years ago. Only as we have courage through the will to affirm as true those forces and

values which show themselves the highest in our own inner life, shall we gain a standard for the understanding of the spiritual history of the race, and attain to the certainty of God, "of that God whom Jesus Christ called his Father, and who is likewise our Father."²²

But, studying Christianity from this vantage ground, we shall not be disappointed in what we find.

If we have a right to say that the gospel is the knowledge and the recognition of God as Father, the certainty of redemption, humility and joy in God, power of action and brotherly love—if it is essential to this religion that its founder shall not be forgotten through emphasis upon his message, nor the message in emphasis upon the founder—then history shows that the gospel has really maintained its power, and still maintains it.²³

Such, in briefest compass, is Harnack's answer to the question, What is Christianity? If to any of our readers it shall seem to lack some element prominent in his own thought or precious to his own experience, we beg him to remember again the circumstances of its origin, and the audience to which it is addressed. It is not the individual Christian, unfolding to his fellow-Christians the riches of his own experience, but the man of science making report to thoughtful men who recognize only the scientific method, what modern history has to tell them of the Christian faith. The reserve made necessary by the nature of the task makes all the more impressive the conviction which is its final outcome. Studying Christianity with all the tools which modern criticism provides, putting away as far as may be all individual presuppositions, this—declares our author—is what I find Christianity to be—this vital spiritual force, enlightening, renewing, transforming; assuming new forms with each new age, having a new answer to each new question, yet remaining in essence ever the same; in its perpetual youth outliving empires and philosophies; having as fresh a message for the men of the twentieth century as of the first; as worthy of our best devotion today as in the days which gave it birth. One may differ from Harnack in points of detail; one may feel that he has not always preserved the true proportion in his statement

²² P. 189.

²³ P. 187.

of the elements of the gospel, and that a different grouping would be more effective; one may wish that the redemptive note in Christianity had been struck more clearly from the first, and that the person of the Christ had received even stronger emphasis in his gospel; all these things are of slight importance compared with the fact that in these pages Christianity has been so described as to win men who know it not to a new insight into its greatness, and to wake within those who have become estranged from it through misconception a fresh sense of its power. It is easy to prove, when men believe already; but to bring conviction where none exists is a more difficult task, and a greater. For this, we venture to think, these lectures have a peculiar fitness. Disclaim it as he will, there is more apology in Harnack's history than in twenty volumes of the Bridgewater treatises.

Of the special points of interest which the lectures suggest we have no space to speak. The author is commonly classified as a Ritschlian, and the influence of Ritschl is clearly apparent here, as in his earlier work. Like the elder theologian, Harnack lays all stress upon the distinctive features of Christianity, and has little patience with the speculation which would construct it *a priori* or resolve it into a colorless natural religion. But the sharpness of the old antithesis is gone. In many ways the author shows himself large-minded enough to recognize the truth in other schools than his own. Distinctive as Christianity may be, it takes for granted a pre-existing religious capacity, and deserves its unique place because it realizes an ideal grounded in the nature of man as man. The same breadth of view shows itself in Harnack's conception of the historical Christ. Christianity, according to Harnack, began with Christ, but did not stop with him. The later developments, while involving a modification of the original gospel, are not illegitimate. Paul gives us essential Christianity as truly as Jesus, and his gospel of the crucified and risen Lord must find its place in our definition. Even Catholicism — for all its errors — had its appointed work to do. Its dogmas — foreign as they seem to our thought — were the natural forms in which the gospel expressed itself

under the conditions of an earlier age, and by no means deserve the indiscriminate condemnation sometimes heaped upon them. Christ is too great completely to be grasped by any age, and all history is the scene of his influence and the witness to his continuing power.

In all this there is ground for encouragement. The central theological problem of our day is the definition of Christianity. How shall we grasp the distinctive features of our religion with the clearness which science demands without losing sight of the variety and flexibility which history discloses, and which are necessary for the freedom of the religious life? It is a great thing to have this problem stated with the clearness which we find in these lectures. It is a still greater to find so frank a recognition of the manifold factors which must enter into its solution. For the accomplishment of this task no narrow or petty spirit will suffice. There must be a large sympathy, a profound insight, a deep and a keen sense of spiritual values, wherever found. Reverence and fearlessness, humility and faith, must go hand in hand. These qualities Harnack possesses. He would be the last to claim finality for his results. Is it too much to say that in method and in spirit he has set an example which will not soon be outgrown?